



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

Marketing &
Regulatory
Programs Business
Services


Human Resources
Division

1400 Independence
Avenue, SW
Washington, DC
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DATE: March 14, 2012

SUBJECT: Notice of Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) and/or
Voluntary Separation Incentive Payment (VSIP)

TO: APHIS Employees in VSIP/VERA occupations

FROM: Marsha A. Wiggins 
Director, MRP Human Resources

As you have heard from Secretary Vilsack and Dr. Parham during the past few months, agencies across USDA are facing budget reductions, and are continuing to focus on streamlined organizations and high-level priorities. Because of the funding cuts we have received, APHIS has already taken steps to implement short-term stop gap savings measures and more efficient and effective work processes. The Agency has begun a review of its workforce to ensure our organization is staffed at a level that can be sustained within the new budget environment.

As part of that review, in addition to experiencing normal agency attrition, APHIS is offering Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) (also known as “early out”) and Voluntary Separation Incentive Payment (VSIP) (also known as “buyout”) opportunities to a wide range of employees to create some flexibility that will allow us to continue supporting our organization while managing funding reductions.

APHIS is offering 300 VSIP opportunities to permanent employees, APHIS-wide, in occupations and grade levels that were not included in the last VSIP opportunity, with the exception of Student Trainees and employees in the following occupations: Information Technology (Information Security) Specialists, Veterinary Medical Officers, and Animal Health Technicians. However, employees in those occupations who are located in the Veterinary Services Area Offices in Arizona, Louisiana, Maryland, and Oregon are eligible to apply.

Your position of record indicates that you are in an occupational series to which the VERA and VSIP opportunities are being offered. Please see Enclosure 1 for the occupational series that are included.

Voluntary Early Retirement Authority

APHIS is offering the VERA opportunity to employees who meet the minimum age and length of service criteria. The VERA expands the normal retirement eligibility to allow employees to voluntarily retire, with an immediate annuity, with 20 years of service at age 50, or at 25 years of service regardless of age. This VERA opportunity is only offered to employees in the occupational series identified in Enclosure 1.

Voluntary Separation Incentive Payment

APHIS is offering a VSIP opportunity, or buyout, for those employees in the occupational series identified in Enclosure 1. Buyouts provide a financial incentive for employees to voluntarily separate by optional retirement, voluntary early retirement, or resignation. The amount received for the buyout during this offer will be a maximum of \$25,000. Any subsequent buyouts, if offered, are expected to be less than \$25,000. Please note that if an employee separates with a buyout and subsequently accepts federal employment within five years of separation, the entire amount of the buyout must be repaid. Eligible employees who apply for the VSIP but who do not receive it, may choose to retire under the VERA without a VSIP.

You are eligible to apply for a VSIP/buyout if:

1. You serve under a permanent appointment in one of the occupational series listed in Enclosure 1;
2. You separate from the Federal service by voluntary resignation, voluntary early retirement, or regular voluntary retirement no later than April 30, 2012; and
3. By the time you separate, you have been continuously employed in the Federal Government for the last 36 months.

You are not eligible to apply for a VSIP/buyout if:

- You do not meet all three of the above criteria;
- You are a reemployed annuitant;
- You are eligible for disability retirement;
- You are in receipt of a specific notice of involuntary separation for misconduct or unacceptable performance;
- You have received a buyout before;
- You have received a student loan repayment benefit within 36 months of separating;
- You have received a recruitment or relocation incentive within 24 months of separating;
- You have received a retention incentive within 12 months of separating;
- You are in a position covered by a Direct Hire authority in use at USDA: For APHIS, those positions are Veterinary Medical Officer, GS-0701, and Information Technology Specialist (Information Security), GS-2210, grade 9 and above positions that are not located in the Veterinary Services Area Offices in Arizona, Louisiana, Maryland, and Oregon; or
- You are in a Student Trainee position.

VSIP Application Process

The VSIP/buyout is neither a right nor a benefit. Applying for a separation incentive payment is entirely voluntary and APHIS management, in collaboration with Human Resources, will make all final decisions on which applications are approved, according to the outlined criteria.

The VSIP/buyout application period is from March 19 to April 13, 2012.

Buyout applications will be processed in the order received, i.e., first come, first served; therefore, interested employees are encouraged to apply immediately by submitting an Application for Voluntary Separation with a Buyout, Enclosure 8, during the application period which begins March 19, 2012, and ends April 13, 2012.

Buyout and retirement annuity (if applicable) estimates will be provided to all eligible employees who submit a buyout application. It will not be necessary to send in separate requests to obtain this information.

Please read the application carefully before signing it. Employees who submit a timely and complete application will be notified by email of approval or disapproval of their application, and will be provided with instructions for the next steps in the retirement or separation process. If approved, you must separate from service through voluntary resignation, voluntary early retirement, or regular voluntary retirement no later than April 30, 2012, unless you submit a request to withdraw your application before your date of separation.

Your decision to separate by retirement or resignation is voluntary. This is an important decision and you are encouraged to seek information from your servicing HR specialists for assistance in making an informed choice. We have a team of specialists who are available to assist you during this process, as shown in the links below.

Please review the information in the enclosures thoroughly.

Enclosures:

To assist you with your decision-making process, the following information is included:

Enclosure 1: List of occupational series eligible for VERA/VSIP opportunity
http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/benefits/downloads/Positions_in_APHIS_Eligible_for_VSIP.pdf;

Enclosure 2: Human Resources Contacts for APHIS employees

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/benefits/downloads/Contact_Your_Servicing_HR_Specialists.pdf ;

Enclosure 3: Frequently Asked Questions on VERA, so that you better understand this benefit

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/benefits/downloads/VERA_FAQs.pdf ;

Enclosure 4: Other Considerations for VERA, so that you take appropriate steps to be prepared

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/benefits/downloads/other_considerations.pdf ;

Enclosure 5: Frequently Asked Questions on VSIP, so that you understand the implications of a buyout

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/benefits/downloads/VSIP_FAQs.pdf ;

Enclosure 6: VSIP Tax Considerations, so you are aware of tax information

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/benefits/downloads/VSIP_Tax_Considerations.pdf; and

Enclosure 7: VSIP Guidance on Reemployment and Contracts

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/benefits/downloads/VSIP_Guidance_Reemployment_Contracts.pdf

Enclosure 8: APHIS Application for Voluntary Separation with a Buyout, should you choose to take advantage of this offer.

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/benefits/downloads/APHIS_Application_for_Voluntary_Separation_with_Buyout.doc